The Chair in CHINA

BY LOUISE HAWLEY STONE

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM TORONTO

The cover design is from a jade plaque of Pan Chao, the author of part of the *Nu Chieh,* or The Forbiddings for Women. She dates from the later Han dynasty, and by order of the Emperor was known to the ladies of the Court as Master or Teacher; she was the sister of Pan Ku, author of the *Han Shu,* or History of the Dynasty.

THE CHAIR IN CHINA

The Elder Statesmen sit on the mats,
And wrangle through half the day;
A hundred plans they have drafted and dropped
And mine was the only way.

HELEN WADDELL—*Lyrics from the Chinese*

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By
LOUISE HAWLEY STONE

Toronto, 1952
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY

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Prefatory Note

THE AIM of this short study in the large field of Chinese furniture is a restricted one. The Royal Ontario Museum has in its collections a number of interesting, important, and unpublished pieces of evidence on the Chinese chair. It is with the double purpose of contributing to the discussion on the development of the chair and of making its material as widely known as possible that the Museum publishes this book. It is written by Louise Hawley Stone, and is based on a thesis presented by her for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of East Asiatic Studies, University of Toronto.

GERARD BRETT
Director

Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology
Toronto, September, 1951

Contents

	Introduction	ix
I	Early Archaeological and Literary Evidence	1
II	The First Chairs in China	5
III	The Chair from Han to Sung	16
IV	The Chair from Sung to Ch'ing	22
	Bibliography	47
	Index	49

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Introduction

The art of cabinet making in China has received, up to the present time, little attention from Westerners, and has never been considered one of the major arts. The chair in particular is a utilitarian piece, and is so taken for granted that its history in China has never attracted serious study. There is little literature on the subject in either East or West. Chinese sources yield only a few entries in encyclopaedias and some woodcuts found in old Chinese Books, and Western sources afford little more. Actual pieces of Chinese furniture in collections are not numerous. China's history of fires, floods, and wars has not been conducive to the preservation of such a fragile thing as wooden furniture. Excavations have brought to light little actual furniture, although had more care been used in tracing the contours of the remains of furniture found, our knowledge of this art might have been greatly enriched.

This paucity of source material is one of the most pressing problems which beset the research worker in this field. None the less the pieces of Chinese furniture available to-day reveal such distinction in execution and design that they stimulate further investigation. Their full appreciation by the West has been hindered mainly by lack of knowledge—a lack which it is modestly hoped may be partially met by the following brief treatise.

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L. H. S.

CHAPTER I

Early Archaeological and Literary Evidence

(c. 1400 B.C. - 206 B.C.)

For some centuries the Chinese have used the chair to a much greater extent than any other Eastern nation. It has been known to them for possibly 2000 years, yet many centuries passed before it attained anything like universal use in their homes. The earliest archaeological records indicate that the Chinese did not customarily sit flat, as many other people did, but knelt on the ground, leaning back on their heels; a posture which is portrayed in the archaic script of the incised bones known as the oracle bones.[1] These date from about 1200 B.C. and contain among other items the pictograph *tso* . Professor Yetts believes that the character *tso* meant "to sit," or, more exactly, to sit back on the heels while kneeling.[2] This position protected the sitter in some degree from the cold and dampness of the ground.

Further protection was afforded by mats. Judging from their frequent mention in ancient texts, mats were widely used from the earliest historical period. They not only added to the comfort of the sitter but also indicated social position. The *I Li*, the *Chou Li* and the *Li Chi*, ritual texts originating in the late Chou dynasty, contain many references to mats, which played a large part in the ceremonies of capping of boys, marriage, feasting, and sports. Mats, indeed, were considered of such importance that one section in the *I Li* is devoted to mats and another to "the rule for ascending and descending the mat." The different materials of which the mats were made are also mentioned; some were woven of straw or rush, others

[1] L. C. Hopkins, "Pictographic Reconnaissances," Pt. VI, *J.R.A.S.*, 1924, pp. 421-7.

[2] W. P. Yetts, "Concerning Chinese Furniture," *J.R.A.S.*, October, 1949, p. 134.

were made from reeds and ornamented with a dark silk border. It appears from these ancient sources, in fact, that mats were common in early China, and they may safely be called the first pieces of seating furniture used there.

The next step in the development of a seat was the low platform which was in use as early as the Han dynasty (206 B.C. to A.D. 221). These platforms were placed either under or over the mats, adding to the sitter's comfort by raising him from the ground. They became the basic units of much furniture in China and were used as beds, as platforms to kneel on, and as tables for food.

A small low platform or table was used as an arm rest. This was known as a *chi* 几 and was usually placed on the left side so that the arm could be supported and the discomfort of the kneeling position relieved; a good example of the use of the *chi* is illustrated on a stone slab of the Wu Tombs.[3] The *chi* was gradually extended in length so that it could support both arms, and was then placed in front of the sitter; this stage appears on a bas-relief from Shan-tung, described by Chavannes as "un personage assis, semble-t-il, dans un fauteuil."[4] In this relief a kneeling figure is seen, with the long *chi* in front of him, partly hidden, however, by his large sleeves. A semi-circular *chi* with legs at three points, and placed in front of the user, was a further development. These semi-circular *chi* appear from the 6th to the 8th centuries A.D. in Taoist sculptures of the Heaven-honoured One, and in Buddhist stelae and rock carvings of the same period.[5]

The change from the kneeling position to the use of the low platform, with or without arm rests, and finally to the sitting position with legs pendant, similar to that of today, was not made quickly. The earliest available record of a person seated with the legs pendant is a pictorial one, found on one

[3]E. Chavannes, *Mission Archéologique dans la Chine Septentrionale*, Plates, Part 1, Pl. LXV.

[4]*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, Chap. V, p. 271, and Pl. LXXV, stones of Leang Tch'eng Chan.

[5]W. P. Yetts, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

of the Hsiao-t'ang Shan incised stone slabs of the 2nd century A.D.[6] or a little earlier. Here a figure representing the Weaving Maiden is shown, seated on a stool or bench at a loom, with her legs pendant. A similar figure seated at a loom is found on one of the Wu Tomb slabs, also of the 2nd century A.D.[7] These two illustrations suggest that a sitting position at the height generally accepted today, eighteen to twenty inches off the floor, was used in China, at least at a loom, about A.D. 150.

The *Erh-ya* dictionary, usually attributed to the 2nd century B.C., contains the character *i* 椅 . This pictograph originally suggested a tree (the *ch'iu* 楸 *catalpa Kaempferi*) and when chairs came into use, this symbol was borrowed to represent the chair.[8] It may have been used for a chair as early as the Han dynasty although its presence in the dictionary is not a positive proof, and no actual chairs of that period have survived. No chair earlier than the Sung dynasty exists today, although it seems fair to presume that if chairs had been made of a less perishable material than wood, some traces of earlier examples would be extant. There is, in fact, some reason to suppose that wood construction of furniture was employed as early as the Shang dynasty (c. 1766-1123 B.C.),[9] and one authority states that chairs were in use in the Chou dynasty (c. 1122-255 B.C.).[10] Representations of chairs on objects ascribed to the Han dynasty, however, are available.

[6]E. Chavannes, *op. cit.*, Plates, Part 1, Pl. XXX, No. 53.
[7]*Ibid.*, Pl. XLIV, No. 75.
[8]A. W. Hummel, personal letter to the writer.
[9]G. Ecke, *Chinese Domestic Furniture.*
[10]Herbert A. Giles, *History of Chinese Literature*, p. 5.

PLATE I

Miniature bronze, Han dynasty.
Excavated at Hsin Hsiang in North Honan. A person seated in a chair with legs folded under.
Height 2½". NB. 2778

Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto.

CHAPTER II

The First Chairs in China

(206 B.C. - A.D. 221)

One of the most significant archaeological finds relating to the development of the chair in China is a small bronze now in the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology. It is in full round and shows a figure seated in a chair (Plate I). According to Bishop W. C. White, the object was said to have come from the Hsin-hsïang Hsien area in North Honan, and to have been associated with other characteristically Han material. The redness of the bronze is typical of Han, as is the extensive patination of the object, while the head of the figure is similar to the cruder bronze figurines of the late Chou period.[1] The figure is seated with the legs either crossed or folded under, thus giving a clear view of the front of the chair. This is in one solid piece with two cut-outs, leaving a simply carved splat in the middle, a pattern of ornamental cut-outs developed during Han.[2] Here these cut-outs appear to represent the first step toward the support of the seat by legs, rather than by solid sides or a solid base. The back of the chair has two legs, one at each corner, which stand without stretcher for support. The arms and back appear to be of one solid piece of wood, which is devoid of ornament. There is a horizontal projection at each end of the top of the back, which does not support any construction and would seem to be added solely for appearance. The whole figure is crude in design and construction.

Two other chairs from objects attributed to the Han dynasty are shown in Plates II and III. These photographs are of rubbings[3] taken from bricks which were in the pos-

[1]Wm. C. White, *Tombs of Old Loyang, passim.*

[2]G. Ecke, *op. cit.*, p. 14. Daniel S. Dye, *A Grammar of Chinese Lattice*, pp. 30-1.

[3]The rubbings are in the possession of Miss Helen E. Fernald.

PLATE II

Stone rubbing, Han dynasty.
A female figure seated in a straight chair with legs pendant.

Miss Helen Fernald, Toronto.

PLATE III

Stone rubbing, Han dynasty.

A male figure seated in a straight chair with legs pendant. A companion to Plate II. Possibly these two are a husband and wife.

Miss Helen Fernald, Toronto

session of Lord Li of Shanghai in 1929,[4] and are said to have come from Loyang, Honan, and to date from the Han dynasty. They show a man and a woman seated in chairs. The figures are represented as dressed in long loose skirts, but it can be seen clearly enough that they are seated with legs pendant and with their feet on the floor. In each case the front and back legs of the chair are joined by three stretchers, two close together about the middle of the legs and one almost at the foot. A single stretcher, on a line with the latter, is indicated between the front legs (Plate II). The backs are both obscured, but, judging from the posture of the figures, they are straight. These chairs show an advance in design over the previous example. The crude cut-out base has been replaced by four separate legs joined near the bottom by plain stretchers; both the chairs and the figures seated in them have an air of refinement which is completely lacking in the bronze model.

Any clue to an early Chinese chair is always exciting to the research worker in this field. The chair shown in Plates IV and V[5] is particularly so, first because the stone on which it is carved was discovered in its original location, and second, because of the style of the chair itself. This chair was carved on a stone in a Han tomb in Hsin-ching in the province of Szechwan. These tombs, called by the Chinese the "Tombs of the Man Tzu" or Aborigines, occur in caves in the hills along the lower Min River. Some of them date as early as 316 B.C.[6] The main entrance was small and led into a long narrow corridor with many small chambers opening off it; once the main door was opened, all the small chambers were readily accessible, with the result that many of them were rifled years ago. Some coins, *wu-chu* and *pan-liang*, are about all that remains, other than the carved stones which adorned the walls. These stones are all Han in character and of the Hsin-ching type. The chair carved on this slab could be as early as A.D. 1 and can certainly not be later than A.D. 200.[7] This is the earliest

[4]Lord Li is a nephew of Li Hung-chang.
[5]Photographs from rubbings in the possession of Lewis C. Walmsley.
[6]From conversation with Daniel S. Dye.
[7]From conversation with Daniel S. Dye.

PLATE IV

Stone rubbing, Han dynasty.
A chair with curved back rail and legs crossed scissors fashion.

Lewis C. Walmsley, Toronto.

PLATE V

Stone rubbing, Han dynasty.
Another representation of the chair shown on Plate IV. This photograph shows the manner of lacing used to attach the seat to the frame.

Lewis C. Walmsley, Toronto.

chair shown without a seated figure, and is quite different in design from those previously noted. It embodies such new features as a curved back splat, a rounded back rail ending in curved arms (Plate IV), a seat which appears to be sewn or fastened with leather thongs and is therefore probably of a pliable material (Plate V), and crossed legs supported at the feet from front to back. Could the innovations used in this chair have come from the West, or was the chair itself a "foreigner" from the West? The curved back had been designed by the Greeks. The rounded back rail, ending in curved arms, was used in the chairs of all the peoples of the Mediterranean world from 4000 to 200 B.C. These features could have been used by anyone, but up to this time no Western peoples had combined them in one piece. This chair from the Szechwan tomb must therefore be purely Chinese, not an importation.

Towards the end of the 2nd century A.D., a complete chair did come into China from the West. This was the *hu ch'uang* or "barbarian's bed," and the credit for its introduction is given to Emperor Ling Ti (A.D. 168-187). Ling Ti was noted for his enthusiasm for foreign furniture, especially for foreign chairs.[8] This type of chair is also mentioned in the Ch'ing dynasty encyclopaedia, *Ku-chien T'u-shu Chi-cheng*, section 215, which says that the *hu ch'uang* was in use at the end of Han. Its resemblance to a modern folding chair is startling (Plate VI).[9] The design is simple and has some new features: head rest, long straight side arms, and foot stool. The rigid bars which joined the feet ran across between the pairs of front legs and back legs, not as side rails from front to back legs, as in the chair from the Hsin-ching Tomb.

To judge from the picture, the seat of the *hu ch'uang* was made of woven material, such as rattan or leather, so that it

[8]The late Dr. John Ferguson states that the first chairs were introduced in the reign of Ling Ti, that they were known as *hu ch'uang*, (the character *ch'uang* means to lean on) or "barbarian's couches," and were made of bamboo or wood. J. C. Ferguson, "Chinese Furniture," *T'ien Hsia Monthly*, Vol. IV (January-May, 1937), p. 246.

[9]*San-ts'ai Tu-hui*, c. 1607-1609. Section on Implements, Book 12, p. 14a. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

搜神記曰胡床戎翟之器
也風俗通曰漢靈帝好胡
服景師作胡床此蓋其始
也今之醉翁諸椅竹木開
爲之制各不同然皆胡床
之遺意也

PLATE VI

could be easily folded. Various authorities consider that this chair was derived from the Turkish couch. The Turks at that time lived to the south-west of the borders of Han China, and it is suggested that in this as in other respects they acted as intermediaries between the peoples of the West and the Chinese.[10] Wherever it came from, the *hu-ch'uang* remained a popular chair for several hundred years, and is mentioned in literature centuries after the Han dynasty. Yu Chien-wu, a Liang dynasty poet (A.D. 502-557), wrote a poem in praise of it.[11]

Another type of chair which came from the West is shown in a remarkable example now in the British Museum (Plate VII). This chair was excavated by Sir Aurel Stein in Chinese Turkestan at the Niya site, which can be dated to the 3rd or 4th century A.D.[12] It is twenty-three inches high and twenty-six inches wide, and is firmly held together by wooden pegs passing through dowels and tenons. The carving is very elaborate and shows a dominating Indian influence.[13] It is, however, rough; nothing is centred or measured, and there is much

[10]Berthold Laufer, *Chinese Pottery of the Han Dynasty*, pp. 234-6.
[11]*Ku Chien T'u Shu Chi Ch'eng*, Chap. 215.
[12]Basil Gray, British Museum, in a personal letter to the writer.
[13]Sir Aurel Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, Vol. I, p. 334. "The great interest of this ancient piece of furniture, which shows the closest resemblance to decorative motives familiar from Gandhara reliefs, is the four-petalled flower of a shape closely approaching the large purple clematis which forms its most frequent feature and is well known in certain Indo-Corinthian capitals."

PLATE VI

The Hu Ch'uang or "barbarian's bed", Han dynasty.
Diagram in *San-ts'ai Tu-hui* compiled by Wang Ch'i. Preface dated 1607.
Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The following is a translation. made at the Library of Congress, of the text which appears on the plate;

"It is said in the Sou Sheng Chi (3rd Century A.D.) that the Hu-bed is of foreign origin. The Fêng Su Tung (12th Century A.D.) says that the Emperor of the Han Dynasty was fond of the Hu-bed. Ching Shih made the Hu-bed which was its origin. The easy chair of today, for the "drinking old man" (see Plate XXIV below) is made either of bamboo or wood. The ways of making the chairs are different, but the origin can be traced to the Hu-bed."

PLATE VII

Wooden chair, 3rd-4th century A.D.

Excavated at Niya by Sir Aurel Stein. It is highly ornamented by carvings of Indian design. The carving is rough, nothing is centred or measured and there is much repetition in the elements composing the design. The chair is tenoned and dowelled.
Height 23″. Width 26″.

British Museum, London.

repetition in the floral elements composing the design.[14] The seat is square and the back was probably straight, although curved-back chairs were known in India at this time. A good representation of the Indian type of armchair with circular round back and round seat appears on one of the reliefs of Amaravati.[15] It could therefore have accompanied the Buddhist religion into China as early as the first century A.D.

The literary and archaeological material available from the Han dynasty yields only six chairs, but the lack in numbers is compensated for by variety of design and construction. From the crude and simply made box-like chair shown in Plate I to the ornately carved chair shown in Plate VII no fewer than seven or eight major innovations occur. The box-like under part gave way to four separate legs. Stretchers between the legs were employed. The curved back-splat and rounded back rail ending in curved arms were used. Seats of soft material or rattan, which could be laced on the frames, appeared, as did legs crossed scissors fashion. One variation was a folding chair with head rest and foot rest, and the last example was a rigid chair highly ornamented with carving. This, although found outside the borders of China, is interesting as the most ancient chair to be excavated in the East. The Niya site at which Sir Aurel Stein found it was on one of the earliest travelled routes between China and the West and the route over which Buddhism seems first to have entered China. The chair is unmistakably Indian in style of carving, and serves mainly to show one of the styles available to China with the introduction of Buddhism.

[14]Sir Aurel Stein, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 397.

[15]René Grousset, *The Civilizations of the East*, Vol. II, p. 40, Fig. 28. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*. This type of chair survived in Singalese art up to the early part of the 16th century.

CHAPTER III

The Chair from Han to Sung

(A.D. 221-1127)

It seems likely, then, that the introduction of Buddhism in the first century A.D. could have been the occasion for introducing the chair into China.[1] There is no reference in any of the sources to the type of chair thus introduced, but it seems probable that if it came from India it was at least highly ornamented.

If the chair did come into China with the new religion, its arrival was unnoticed, for from the 3rd or 4th century A.D., the date of the Niya site, there is very little material on the chair, only a few references are to be found, and the majority of these do not add greatly to our information. An amusing record from the Yung Hsing period (A.D. 409-413) tells of the Emperor of the Wei paying a visit to the home of Fa-kuo, a Buddhist monk, ". . . and since the doorway was too small and narrow to permit the passage of a sedan chair, he enlarged it."[2] About a century and a quarter later, a form of chair on wheels was evidently in use; a representation of one on a stone sarcophagus of that period[3] looks more like a cart or chariot than a chair.

Valuable reference to the chair occurs about the end of the sixth century. The history of the Sui dynasty (A.D. 589-618), *Tzu Chih T'ung Chien,* edited by Ssu-ma Kuang,[4] says that

[1] J. Edkins, "Chinese architecture", *J.N.C.B.R.A.S.*, Vol. 24 (1889-90), p. 258, says that chairs were first used in China in the Buddhist period. See also I. Tsing, *Memoirs,* pp. 22-24. Mr. Tsing states in this work that Buddhist monks in China, imitating the practice of their brethren in India, used to sit on chairs at meals.

[2] J. R. Ware, "Wei Shan on Buddhism", *T'oung Pao,* No. 30 (1933), p. 129.

[3] This sarcophagus is dated A.D. 535-540. William Rockhill Nelson Gallery, Kansas City, reproduced in *University Prints,* Ser. 0, Sec. 11, No. 0-162.

[4] *Tzu Chih T'ung Chien.* ed. by Ssu-ma Kuang, Vol. 242. This history is included in the Ch'ing dynasty encyclopedia, *Ku Chin T'u Shu Chi Ch'eng.*

the name of the *hu ch'uang* was, at that time, changed to *chiao-ch'uang* 交牀 , and describes the *chiao ch'uang* as a "cross bed." There was a horizontal bar at the bottom, and the legs were crossed scissors fashion, indicating that the *chiao ch'uang* could be folded.

During the T'ang dynasty (A.D. 618-906), which followed the Sui, more material on the chair comes to light than in the previous four centuries. Not only is the chair mentioned as a *hu ch'uang* ("barbarian's bed"), *sheng ch'uang* (rope bed), and an *i* (chair) in the literature and history of the period, but there is at least one example of the chair in T'ang art.

In a T'ang prose work a reference is made to a village elder riding in an "open chair,"[5] and we meet the chair again in the history of T'ang Hsuan-tsung (A.D. 713-756).[6] This scholar, it is said, wished to encourage his students to write poems and discuss the classics and literature. He therefore built a platform on which he put a chair *i* 椅 . The best scholar, one Chang Chin-ling, was honoured by being allowed to sit in it. The *Tzu Chih T'ung Chien,* in the section on the history of the T'ang dynasty, says that the name of the *hu ch'uang* was changed to *sheng ch'uang* 繩牀 ,[7] which would be the second change in the name of the "barbarian's bed." The *sheng ch'uang* is described as consisting of a wooden frame with holes in the side bars, through which string or rope was passed to make a woven seat. There was a board at the back and a kind of arm on each side, and the whole frame rested on four legs. The soft seat indicates that this too was probably a folding chair. It is recorded in the same history that the Emperor Mu Tsung of T'ang sat on a *sheng ch'uang* to receive his officers.[8]

[5]E. D. Edwards, *Chinese Prose Literature of the T'ang Period,* Vol. 1 (Miscellaneous Literature), p. 129. In a footnote in this translation, Dr. Edwards suggests that the "open chair" is a chair used particularly by military officials. She also quotes Giles, who suggests that the "open chair" may be a "cool chair" and would have an awning. Giles gives the characters *liang chiao* 凉轎 (cool chair or cool sedan chair).

[6]Ch'ing Dynasty Encyclopaedia, *Ku Chin T'u Shu Chi Ch'eng,* Chap. 214.

[7]*Tzu Chih T'ung Chien,* ed. by Ssu-ma Kuang, Vol. 242.

[8]*Ibid.*

These few literary references are paralleled by a scroll painting attributed to this dynasty which shows a man sitting in a chair. This painting, said to be by Ch'i-han, is entitled "Reading."[9] Unfortunately the only reproduction available is somewhat indistinct; the seated figure covers most of the chair and the remainder is blurred. If, however, its style can be judged from the other furniture shown in the painting, it is carved and shows possible Western influence.

Up to the end of T'ang we have to rely on literature, history, and art for descriptions or representations of the chair. The Sung dynasty (A.D. 960-1279) gives us our first actual example. This chair, shown on Plate VIII, is, or was prior to World War II, in the Historical Museum in Peking. It was excavated about thirty years ago by some Japanese archaeologists at the Sung site of Chü-lu Hsien in Hopei, which was overwhelmed by flood in A.D. 1108. The excavations brought to light a house in which were found pottery bowls bearing the marks of two families, dishes, chopsticks, spoons, coins, woven mats, and a wooden table and chair.[10] The chair is rough in workmanship, but reconstructed drawings, which it has not been possible to reproduce, show that it has a distinct air of refinement. It is constructed entirely of wood. The back splat is plain and on either side of it there are posts; these are not squared off as if made by a common carpenter, but are rounded pieces of wood which bear a bow-shaped yoke. A simply carved piece under the seat at the corner of each front leg makes a dignified ornament. A plain stretcher runs between the two front legs and there were probably similar stretchers between all the legs.

Another example of an early chair is found on a silvered lead plaque[11] shown in Plate IX. This plaque illustrates two men seated in chairs. The man on the left appears to be at a table. The chair, though largely covered by the seated figure,

[9]John Ferguson, *Survey of Chinese Art*, Chap. IV, pp. 50-1.

[10]*National Museum Historical Bulletin*. Vol. 1, No. 1. Peking, 1926. Plate VIII is taken from this Bulletin.

[11]This silvered lead plaque in the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology has never been dated. Several experts have examined the piece and their opinions vary from the Wei dynasty towards the end of the 6th century to the late Sung dynasty.

PLATE VIII

Table and chair (c. A.D. 1108), Sung dynasty.

Excavated at Chü-lu hsien, 1919-20. The wooden chair is important as the earliest Chinese chair yet discovered. Reproduced from the *National Museum Historical Bulletin*, Peking, 1926, Vol. 1, No. 1, obtained through the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Historical Museum, Peking, China.

PLATE IX

Silvered lead plaque, Sung dynasty.

Two men seated in chairs. The date has not been established, and may be as early as Wei: it is not later than Sung.

9¾″ x 5″. 951.155

Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto.

seems to have a straight back and yoke and no arms. The front legs are straight, ornamented by an incised line down either side. The chair on the right is shown in profile. It is also a straight chair without arms, but it has a curved yoke and curved back legs.

Because this plaque cannot be dated more accurately, the chairs shown on it do not rank in importance with that shown in Plate VIII. However, since they cannot be later than the Sung dynasty they offer comparative material with the chair found at Chü-lu Hsien. This, the earliest Chinese chair extant, is reminiscent of the chairs of earlier periods, shown in Plates II, III, IV, and V; it has that air of simplicity and distinction which could only be achieved through fine line and good proportion. These qualities seem to have pleased the Chinese, for with few variations this has remained the basic pattern for the Chinese chair ever since, as will be seen on the plates in Chapter IV.

From Han times on, contacts with the outside world were increasingly frequent; the many travellers passing back and forth carried an ever greater number of ideas and objects. This enlarging of the cultural horizon of China must have had its effect upon the design, construction, and use of the chair. Certainly, during the nine centuries from the end of Han to the end of the Sung dynasty, more records of chairs are available. They became objects for the artist's attention, and this in itself indicates that it was the custom for people to own and to use them. How much this depended on foreign influence cannot be estimated, but one thing is certain—the Sung chair, the earliest actual chair known to-day, possesses qualities of design and construction not found in the chairs of the majority of civilizations of that time. The Chinese desire for simplicity is well expressed in this chair. Charm and strength are realized by turn. It is functional and yet has a fine sense of balance. It has an economy of ornament which bespeaks the hand of the master craftsman. It is a harmonious whole. It is not a copy of any foreign chair but is distinctly Chinese.

CHAPTER IV

The Chair from Sung to Ch'ing

(A.D. 1280-1912)

Notes on the Plates

The story of the chair in China from the Sung (A.D. 960-1280) to the Ch'ing dynasty (A.D. 1644-1912) can best be told in pictures, for as the oft-quoted Chinese proverb indicates, a look is worth a thousand words. A much greater variety of material exists for this period, and would seem to indicate that the chair became a well-established piece of furniture in China. Illustrations in all pictorial forms, sculpture, and pottery are increasingly numerous from about the 13th century, and actual examples of Chinese chairs are available from the 17th century.

One of the most unusual groups of chairs is found in the miniature pottery tomb pieces of the Ming dynasty (A.D. 1368-1644). The fact that the chair was included as part of the tomb furniture shows that it was considered a necessary part of the individual's equipment for his life in the next world. The models themselves are extremely interesting, for undoubtedly they were copied from actual chairs in use at that time. The examples shown all have curved backs ending in rounded arms (cp. Plates IV-V). Two of the miniature chairs rest on solid sides rather than on separate legs, but this may have been due to the clay medium. These chairs have a cover thrown over the seat. This added to the comfort and appearance of the chair and was also indicative of wealth and rank. The other three miniature models all have crossed legs. This type of leg was used in the barbarian's bed (Plate VI), also on the Han dynasty chair (Plates IV, V). In fact the only new feature that seems to have developed during the centuries is the carving on the back splat. The model shown on Plate XIII

PLATE X

Miniature table and chair, Ming dynasty.
The material is a grey pottery washed over with white clay, and in a few places painted with pigment. The chair has a round back and foot-rest, and a draped seat.

Eumorfopoulos collection, British Museum, London.
(R. L. Hobson, *Catalogue of the Chinese . . . Pottery and Porcelain.* Vol. I, No. 104, Pl. XVIII.)

PLATE XI

Miniature chair, Ming dynasty.

Pottery model from a tomb at Yen-Ling, Central Honan, said also to be the source of the models on Pl. X. The chair is similar to that shown on Pl. X and has a round back, foot-rest bar, and draped seat.

Height 3½". Width 3⅓". NA. 2148

Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto.

PLATE XII

Miniature chair, Ming dynasty.

Pottery model of folding armchair on base. This side view shows the design of the seat and the manner in which the legs and back are attached to it, which is quite different from that shown in Plate XIII. The base is not solid.

British Museum, London.

PLATE XIII

Miniature chair, Ming dynasty.
Pottery model of folding armchair on base; three panels with stamped ornament on back (1) quatrefoil, (2) a spade, (3) a heart.
Height 6 6/8″. Width at base 2 7/16″. Length at base 3 7/16″.
Lucy Maud Buckingham Collection, Art Institute, Chicago.

PLATE XIV

Miniature chairs, Ming dynasty.
Pottery models of folding chairs, similar to that shown on Plate XIII.
Height 6¼". Width 2¾". 918.10.1-3

Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto.

PLATE XV

Woodcut, Ming dynasty.

This woodcut is from a book, *The Story of the Guitar*, by Kao Tung-chia, illustrated by Wang Wen-hêng, and published in 1498. It shows a simple chair with solid back splat, bow-shaped yoke, and no arms. It appears to be a refined interpretation of the chair shown on Plate VIII.

Spencer Collection, New York Public Library, New York.

PLATE XVI

Painting, Ming dynasty.

This scroll painting by T'ang Yin (1470-1524) entitled "Tea Drinking with a bamboo stove under the Wu T'ung Tree," shows a rustic chair without arms.

Kate S. Buckingham Fund, Art Institute, Chicago.

PLATE XVII

Woodcut, Ming dynasty.

This woodcut is from a work entitled *The Control of Destiny,* by Yin Chen-jên, published in 1615. It shows a rustic armchair, with the bark on the wood. A Taoist priest is seated with his legs folded under him. The top rail of the back projects, as do the arms. The traditional cover is thrown over the back and also covers the seat, hanging down a little in front.

Spencer Collection, New York Public Library, New York.

PLATE XVIII

Woodcut, Ming dynasty.

This woodcut is from *The Control of Destiny,* by Yin Chen-jên, 1615. It shows a Taoist priest with legs crossed under him in a rustic chair similar to the one shown on Plate XVII. This chair is without arms and has five legs. A mat hangs over the back.

Spencer Collection, New York Public Library, New York.

PLATE XIX

Painting, Ming dynasty.

This painting of the 17th century is in ink and slight colour on a silk panel. It shows an interior with a young man seated in a chair gazing at his betrothed while her unsuccessful rival waits at one side. The chair with arms is made of tear bamboo (see Plate XXIV) and is simple in outline. The back, arms, and trim under the seat are ornamented with a lattice pattern.

Freer Gallery, Washington, D.C.

PLATE XX

Painting of Liu Pei and Kuan Yü, Ming dynasty.
Ink and colour on silk panel showing a square-seated chair, with open back and arms. It stands on a square platform with a small extension in the front.

Freer Gallery, Washington, D.C.

PLATE XXI

Woodcut, Ch'ing dynasty.

This woodcut is from Vol. 8 of *Imperial Edicts,* written and illustrated by Liang Yen-nien, and dated 1681. It shows a girl seated in an armless chair. The lines of this chair are very simple, its chief beauty being in the solid back splat which has a double curvature.

Spencer Collection, New York Public Library, New York.

PLATE XXII

Woodcut, Ch'ing dynasty.

This woodcut is from Vol. 8 of *Imperial Edicts*, 1681. Two chairs are shown. The top rail on the back extends over the side, and a typical embroidery or brocade panel covers the back and seat of each.

Spencer Collection, New York Public Library, New York.

PLATE XXIII

Woodcut, Ch'ing dynasty.

This woodcut is from Vol. 10 of *Imperial Edicts,* 1681. It shows two armless chairs. The top rail extends over the side rail on the back of each chair. The back view of the solid back splat with double curvature is interesting.

Spencer Collection, New York Public Library, New York.

PLATE XXIV

Woodcut, Ch'ing dynasty.

This woodcut is from Vol. 13 of *Imperial Edicts,* 1681. It shows a reclining chair with an extension platform, and with very long arms. The wood is tear bamboo and the back appears to be caned. This chair is sometimes known as a "drunkard's chair."

Spencer Collection, New York Public Library, New York.

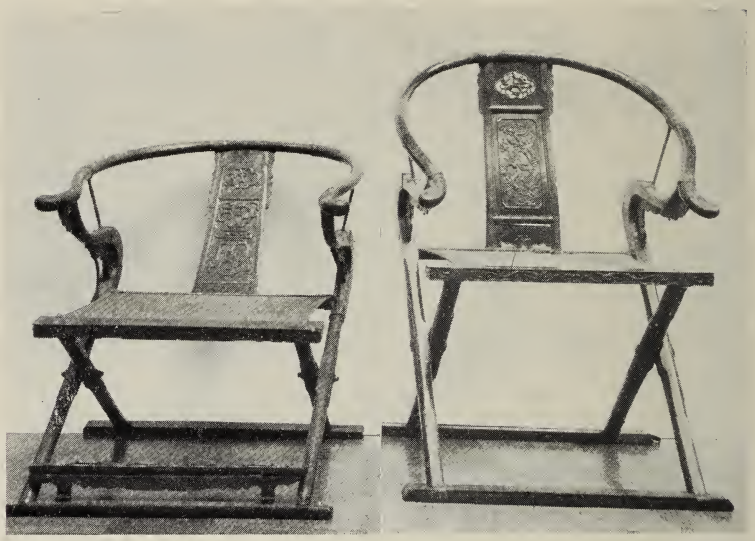

PLATE XXV

Chairs, Ch'ing dynasty.

That on the right came from Ta Cheo Tzu Temple in the Western Hills, Peking. It is said to have been formerly the private property of the late Empress Dowager of China, and to have been used by her when visiting this temple.

Left: Height 40½". Width 31". 951.159

Right: Height 46". Width 31½". 920.8.1

Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto.

PLATE XXVI

Chairs, Ch'ing dynasty.

Side view of the chairs shown on Plate XXV. The one on the left has a carved foot rest. The graceful curve of the back and arms is well shown in this photograph.

Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto.

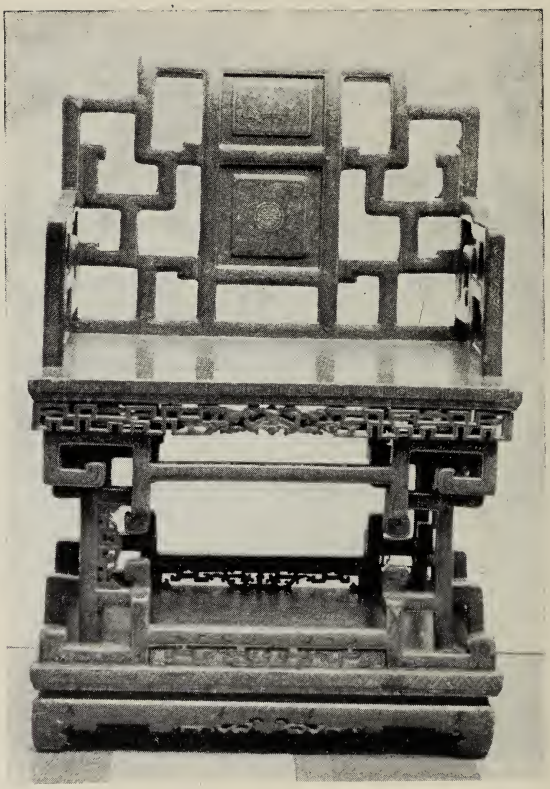

PLATE XXVII

Chair, Ch'ing dynasty.

Red lacquer chair with gold emblem and flower ornamentation. The lattice-like back, arms and legs, are well proportioned. This chair is from the home of Prince Kung Pu Wei, Peking, one of the Iron Crowned Dukes of the old Manchu dynasty.

Height 44½". Width 30½". 921.15.1

Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto.

PLATE XXVIII

Woodcut, Ch'ing dynasty.

This woodcut is from a work, *Biographies of Celebrated Women,* by Wang Ken, published in 1779. It shows a very simple folding camp stool carried by a servitor in the train of a personage on horseback.

Spencer Collection, New York Public Library, New York.

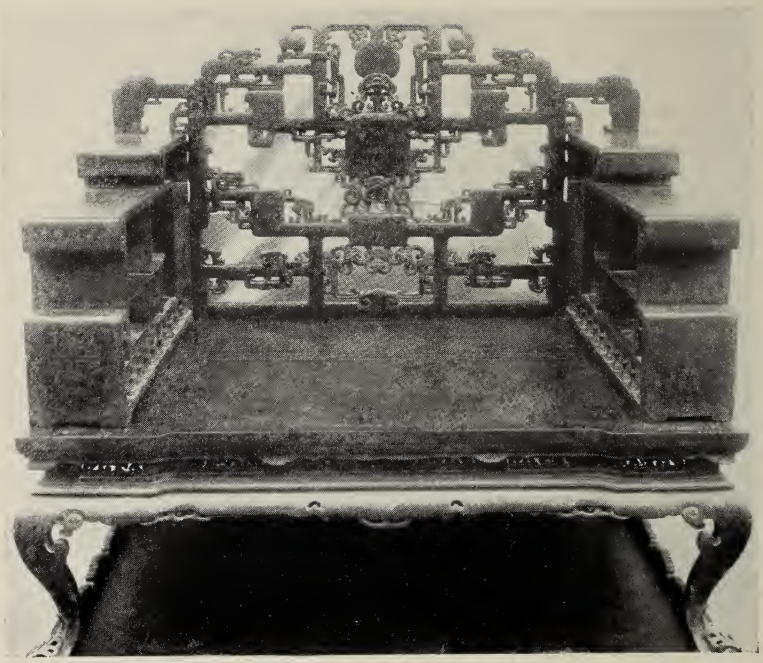

PLATE XXIX

Throne chair, Ch'ing dynasty.
A large black lacquer throne chair with gold decoration.
Height 51″. Width 50¾″. 922.11.1

Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto.

PLATE XXX

Chair, early 18th century.

The design is simple yet full of grace, and the chair embodies features reminiscent of the Sung dynasty chair (Plate VIII).

Mrs. Edgar Stone, Toronto.

has simple motives: a quatrefoil, a spade, and a heart. This may have had some particular significance for the owner of the tomb for which it was made. This cross-legged type of chair could be used for travelling by the insertion of poles (Plate XIV). It was evidently a very popular design, for examples of this type are more numerous than the straight-sided ones.

One of the earliest pictorial examples of a full-size chair of the Ming dynasty is shown on Plate XV. This simple chair is almost a duplicate in outline of the Sung dynasty chair found at Chü-lu Hsien (Plate VIII).

A novel group of chairs is seen in the rustic type (Plates XVI-XVIII). The Chinese, with their keen appreciation of form, could find little to improve on the classic simplicity of outline of the chair they had designed centuries before. But now, with the wider use of the chair, they evidently wished to indicate certain types for certain purposes. So, just as modern garden chairs are made not of mahogany or walnut, but of less pretentious material, the Chinese conceived the idea of leaving the bark on the wood to make an informal chair. This rustic chair was considered suitable for garden use (Plate XVI), also, perhaps because it looked less opulent, for priests and monks.

Another style of chair found in the Ming dynasty was made of tear bamboo (Plates XIX and XXIV). This type of wood provided decoration for a chair of simple outline.

The Ch'ing dynasty chairs, which occur both in the pictorial art of the period and in actual examples, show, for the most part, the same adherence to the simple forms of the earliest Chinese chairs. Two handsome chairs of this period are illustrated on Plates XXV and XXVI. These are the same in outline as the earliest chairs recorded (Plates IV-V) but are ornamented with carving under the arms, on the back splat, and on the foot-rest of the example on the left. This carving is fine in detail and adds materially to the beauty of the chair. A great many chairs and throne chairs were decorated with lacquer, possibly because of the popularity of this style of ornament in Europe (Plate XXVII).

It remains, however, for the average chair (Plate XXX) to carry on the fine tradition of the early types. The Chinese, with their sound intuition, seem to have realized that the chair which their ancestors had designed as early as the 2nd century A.D. could not be greatly improved upon. The two types, the curved back with crossed legs and the straight chair with solid back splat and straight legs, changed very little in their basic design through the centuries. The dignified simplicity of these outlines remained the fundamental characteristic of the Chinese chair.

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Index

Amaravati, reliefs of, 15

Buddhism, 15, 16
Buddhist stelae and rock carvings, 2

chair, 18th century (Stone), 43, 45
Chavannes, E., 2
chi, 2
chiao ch'uang, 17
Ch'i-han, painting by, 18
Ch'ing dynasty, 11, 22, 44
Ch'ing material: woodcuts from *Imperial Edicts*, 34, 35, 36, 37, 44; chairs (R.O.M.A.), 38, 39, 40, 44; woodcut from *Biographies of Celebrated Women*, 41; throne chair (R.O.M.A.), 42
Chou dynasty, 1, 3
Chou Li, 1

Erh-ya dictionary, 3

Greeks, 11

Han dynasty, 2–15, 21, 22
Han material: miniature bronze (R.O.M.A.), 4, 5, 15; stone rubbings (Fernald), 5, 6, 7, 8, 21 (Walmsley), 8, 9, 10, 11, 21, 22, 44; *see also* Niya chair
Hsiao-t'ang Shan incised stone slabs, 3
Hsuan-tsung, 17
hu ch'uang ("barbarian's bed"), 11, 12, 13, 17, 22

i, 3, 17
I Li, 1
Indian influence, 13, 15

Ku-chien T'u-shu Chi-cheng, 11

Liang dynasty, 13
Li Chi, 1
Ling Ti (Emperor), 11

Man Tzu, tombs of, 8
mats, 1, 2
Ming material: pottery tomb pieces, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 44; woodcut from *Story of the Guitar*, 28, 44; painting, by T'ang Yin, 29, 44; woodcuts from *Control of Destiny*, 30, 31, 44; painting, 17th century (Wash.), 32, 44; painting, of Liu Pei and Kuan Yü, 33, 44
Mu Tsung, Emperor, 17

Niya chair, 13–15, 16

oracle bones, 1

platform, 2
posture, 1–3, 5, 8

sarcophagus, stone (A.D. 535–540), 16
Shang dynasty, 3
Shan-tung bas-relief, 2
sheng ch'uang, 17
Stein, Sir Aurel, 13, 15
Sui dynasty, 16–17
Sung dynasty, 3, 18–21, 22, 44
Sung material: table and chair, Chü-lu Hsien site, 18, 19, 21, 44; silvered lead plaque (R.O.M.A.), 18, 20, 21

T'ang dynasty, 17–18
Taoist sculptures, 2
tso, 1
Turkish couch, 13
Tzu Chih T'ung Chien, 16–17

Wei, Emperor of the, 16
West, innovations from, 11–15, 18
Wu tombs, 2, 3

Yetts, W. P., 1
Yu Chien-wu, 13
Yung Hsing period, 16